

2nd Sunday of Advent (A)

7th December 2025

‘Prepare the way for the Lord!’

Is 11: *come[s] forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse* Ps 71: *in His days shall justice flourish ...* Rom 15: *through endurance ... we might have hope* Mt 3: 1–12: *in those days John the Baptist came preaching ...*

The three great figures of Advent — apart from Our Blessed Lord Himself, of course — are, in this order: (i) Isaiah; (ii) John the Baptist; and (iii) Our Lady (supported by St Joseph). The cycle of Scripture is sustained by them, and they give the shape to Advent:

— **Isaiah**, whom we heard from the very first day of Advent last Sunday, in his writings of the 8th c. BC, gives a centuries-long sense of ‘waiting in hope’: his words of prophecy voice the solemn promise that God would redeem His people in a novel and awesome way, “in the fullness of time.”

— **St John the Baptist** will dominate the middle part of Advent, as the final OT prophet and first NT saint and martyr — he is the one who has the privilege of announcing the end of that centuries-long wait, and is able to fulfil that prophecy of Isaiah as “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the Way of the Lord’*

” (Is 40) in his call to repentance out at the River Jordan.

— **Our Blessed Lady**, then, Mary of Nazareth completes the trio, and is the focus, along with St Joseph, of the final octave of Advent days (17th–24th Dec). Advent marks her days of pregnancy and perilous journey. She also fulfils an Isaian prophecy: “*the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name ‘Emmanuel’.*” (Is 7)

These three figures shaping our Advent, spiritual giants, allow us, I think, to appreciate the beauty of this season. They are attractive, dynamic figures, each of them jumping off the pages of these weeks’ Scripture readings, and drawing us in to the ‘reason for the season.’ As I said last week, Advent has a gentle beauty that makes it a spiritual time of year that should not be ignored in the general rush to get to celebrate Christmas. **Isaiah** is the great prophet of ‘waiting’; **St John the Baptist** calls us to get ready properly for the Messiah (and for Christmas) by repentance and confession; and **Our Lady** of necessity had to bide her

time in those 9 months from Annunciation to Nativity, “pondering these things in her heart” with the strong devotion of “that just man,” Joseph, her saintly husband, at her side. There is no way that Isaiah, John the Baptist, or Our Lady & St Joseph, would have been intent on bypassing the precious time of waiting, hoping and longing. It is when Advent is kept well that the atmosphere is created for Christmas to be kept well. Without Advent’s preparation and longing, Christ’s coming at Christmas loses much of its impact. Just as any keeping any great birthday demands meticulous planning for it to come off well, so the Lord is asking us to make concerted preparation in our hearts for the festival of His Nativity. One week of Advent has already gone by, and we have 2½ weeks to go, so it’s crucial that this Sunday we recollect ourselves properly for how we’ll embrace the remainder of Advent.

We cannot avoid the dominant presence of St John the Baptist in the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of this season. Today we hear St Matthew introducing him to his Jewish hearers,

so used to meditating on the Isaian prophecies of the Messiah. Yes, they knew that “*a shoot would come forth from the stump of Jesse*” (Is 11) — that the Messiah would resurrect the house and line of David — and they knew that He would be endowed with a rich abundance of the Spirit of the Lord. They also knew that Isaiah inspired writings had spoken of a fore-runner who would “*prepare the way of the Lord,*” and announce in the wilderness a straightening of “*highway for our God,*” removing the obstacles for the Lord to come (Is 40). St Matthew in the opening verses of ch. 3 has no doubt whom Isaiah was prophesying, in this regard: it is the kinsman of Jesus, the “*friend of the bridegroom,*” St John the Baptist. Our Lord will go on to heap accolades on His blessed cousin, referring to him in many stupendous phrases, such as “*of all those born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen.*” Since Jesus Himself speaks of him in such glowing terms, and since the Church puts him front and centre in the middle period of Advent, we would hardly be right to ignore him or skirt around him.

What would it have been like to have stood with him at the Jordan and hear him preach? Scary, ... weird, ... uplifting, ... challenging? Yes, probably all of those! John was a mystic, an ascetic, a deeply godly spokesman for an announcement of brand new times: he “*wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*” What a sight he would have been! ... and yet as he spoke with such passion he tugged the heart-strings of his hearers, such that some of them even pondered, “Could this be the Messiah?” So John was forced to clarify, to insist, that “*after me is coming one who is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.*” His message was uncompromising, and the religious elite, the experts in the Law, were perturbed by this new and dramatic personality, introducing a new form of cleansing ritual, hitherto unknown in Judaism, to accompany an open expression of repentance. Don’t hide behind your apparent status, he says, don’t just quote that “*we have Abraham as our father,*” as this mere fact of Hebrew descent is insufficient.

To be a member of the Chosen People was no longer enough; one had to act in spiritual accordance with that special relationship: “*bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*”

What does John the Baptist say to us, this 2nd Sunday morning (evening) of Advent? — what would it mean if he were to be standing right here in his camel skin at this lectern? — except that he’d probably be feeling the cold quite a bit! Which of us here would he be evoking humble and heartfelt confessions from? Which of us might he be chastising for hard-heartedness or hypocrisy? Most of us, in all probability he’d be helping to navigate between both those poles, of humility and hypocrisy; our ‘trying,’ and our ‘not trying’ all a bit mixed up. Yet, please God he’d be getting us to think deeply, seriously, but trustingly, about the state of our soul, our preparedness — or otherwise — for Jesus to come “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Let’s make a reflection, now, that will help us get ready for an Advent Confession — if you’ve not already done so ... Let’s truly imagine that St John the Baptist is here, with his

piercing words, designed to help us, without hiding, to clear the obstacles from the soul's highway for our God to come. Imagine he is here, proclaiming that message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is close at hand!" What would he then follow up with, as he gazed around this congregation, if he read your hearts with that prophetic insight of his? He had specific, incisive, words of challenge, as we know, for individuals, ... for tax collectors, ... for soldiers. What would be his words for students? What would be the thing for you, that you would rather he not raise? What would be the topic, the sin, the failing, that you'd feel most awkward for him to touch on, maybe that you'd pray he wouldn't mention? Would it be the relationship with a *parent*? With your *siblings*? With a *roommate*? With a *boyfriend or girlfriend*? With your *studies*? Would it be the relationship with your *phone*? With your *time-keeping (or time-wasting)*? With a *tutor or examiner*? With the *truth*? With your *self, your body, or your health*? What would it be? What's the issue most awkward for you, the thing you'd most want to hide from

John-the Baptist's holy insistent gaze? *Think of it ... name it ...* I suggest that what you've brought to mind is really the very thing you most need to: (i) bring before the Lord gently but urgently in your Advent prayer; and (ii) bring before the Lord openly and in words in your Advent Confession. This is not about *guilt*; it's about freedom: freedom from the sins that most bind us and keep us locked up in patterns of neglect of God and righteous living. You're standing before this great saint, and he wants you to be ready — *really ready* — for Christ to come at Christmas, and that's why he's helping you search your soul deeply and "make straight the highway for our God." He's here at the heart of this Advent liturgy to serve as a prompt to your conscience. Allow him to guide your own gaze and to let in the light to the hidden places which you've been hiding from God. Allow St John the Baptist to convince you that Jesus's Holy Spirit and fire can cleanse you and make your soul a warm, worthy, welcoming home for the baby Christ to be born. What is it you need to get rid of, first? *Think of it, name it, confess it.*